

Message Text

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FOLLOWINGHREPEAT MADRID 5034 SENT ACTION SECSTATE INFO
MOSCOW RABAT MAY 9, 1978.

QUOTE: CONFIDENTIAL MADRID 05034

E.O. 11652: XGDS-L
TAGS: EWWT, PEPR, UR, SP
SUBJECT: SOVIET BUNKERING IN ALGECIRAS

REF: STATE 114413 NOTAL

1. MADRID 1794 (ALSO NOTE MADRID 1546, MADRID 1401 AND
77 MADRID 10260) REPORTED THAT AT A LUNCHEON WITH FOREIGN
JOURNALISTS FEBRUARY 16, PRIME MINISTER SUAREZ REPLIED TO
A QUESTION ABOUT THE SOVIET REQUEST FOR BUNKERING FACILI-
TIES IN ALGECIRAS BY SAYING THE GOS RESPONSE WAS NO. THE
PRESS HERE AND THE "INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE", THAT
WE KNOW OF, SUBSEQUENTLY CARRIED THE STORY WITHOUT IDENTI-
FYING SUAREZ, AND THOSE REPORTS ARE MOST PROBABLY THE
SOURCE OF THE MAGAZINE ARTICLE QUOTED IN REFTEL.

2. SUAREZ' NEGATIVE APPEARS TO HAVE PUT THE MATTER OFF
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FOR AT LEAST SOME TIME TO COME, AND SOME MFA OFFICIALS
HAVE TOLD US THE REQUEST HAS BEEN REFUSED. AS REPORTED
IN MADRID 1546 AND SINCE THEN REPEATED TO US VARIOUS
TIMES BY SPANISH OFFICIALS, HOWEVER, THE FORMAL FOREIGN
MINISTRY POSITION IS THAT SINCE THERE HAS BEEN NO FORMAL
PROPOSAL PUT FORWARD BY THE SOVIETS, THERE HAS BEEN NOTH-
ING FOR THE GOS TO ACCEPT OR REFUSE. (STRICTLY SPEAKING,

THE SPONSOR OF THE IDEA IS INTRAMAR, A JOINT SOVIET-SPANISH SHIPPING ENTERPRISE.) THE BRITISH EMBASSY HERE, WHICH HAS FOLLOWED THE MATTER CLOSELY BECAUSE OF THE RELATION TO GIBRALTAR, AND WITH WHICH WE HAVE BEEN IN REGULAR CONTACT ON THE MATTER, CONSIDERS THAT IT IS "IN SUSPENSE". DESPITE SUAREZ' NEGATIVE, LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN THE ALGECIRAS AREA HAVE CONTINUED TO BEAT THE DRUMS IN FAVOR, AND WE CONSIDER THAT IT COULD REVIVE AT SOME POINT IN THE FUTURE.

3. REGARDING OTHER ASPECTS OF THE MAGAZINE ARTICLE, WE NOTE THAT THE FIGURE OF 1,500 USED FOR ANNUAL MERCHANT SHIP VISITS UNDER THE SOVIET PROPOSAL HAS ALSO BEEN USED IN THE PAST FOR CARGO CONTAINERS THAT WOULD BE HANDLED ANNUALLY. AS REPORTED IN 77 MADRID 9479, THE ANNUAL SHIP VISIT FIGURES GIVEN US BY THE FOREIGN MINISTRY IN THIS CONNECTION WERE 500 THZ FIRST YEAR, 1,000 THE SECOND, AND 3,000 THE THIRD. THE ALLEGED CONCERN OVER THE ECONOMIC IMPACT ON CEUTA IF THE SOVIETS SHIFTED THEIR SHIP-CHANDLERING ACTIVITIES AWAY FROM THERE TO ALGECIRAS WOULD NOT BE AN ILLOGICAL ELEMENT IN GOS THINKING ON THE SUBJECT, NOR WOULD THE IDEA THAT SOME SORT OF CONTINUED SOVIET PRESENCE IN CEUTA MIGHT SERVE AS A RESTRAINT ON MOROCCO, WHICH HAS AN OUTSTANDING CLAIM TO CEUTA AND OTHER OLD SPANISH ENCLAVES IN ITS TERRITORY AND JUST OFF ITS COAST. THE ELEMENTS REPEATEDLY MENTIONED TO US BY MFA OFFICIALS,

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HOWEVER, HAVE LAID PRINCIPAL STRESS ON THE ILLUSORY NATURE OF THE ALLEGED ECONOMIC BENEFITS TO BE DERIVED FROM THE ALGECIRAS EXERCISE, THE HIGH SECURITY RISK POSED BY A SIZEABLE SOVIET PRESENCE ON THE SPANISH MAINLAND, AND A CONCERN THAT SUCH A PRESENCE MIGHT MAKE MORE DIFFICULT A RESOLUTION OF THE UK-SPANISH DISPUTE OVER NEARBY GIBRALTAR.

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